

HARLEM FRIENDSHIP HOUSE NEWS

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CONSUMER'S CO-OPS ON THE MARCH

*By John H. Harmon, Sec.
Harlem Consumer Co-op Society*

Harlem is a community of 450,000 black folk living in the upper tip of Manhattan in greater New York City. They are gathered from every part of the U. S., West Indies, and Central and South America, all of them seeking to find a better way of life . . . only to find themselves hemmed in by fifty-five blocks of the worst tenements in the U. S. A. No jobs, discrimination, inadequate dole are the final culmination of their search for the better things of life. This is what they find in the glittering mecca they thought was Harlem.

There have been a thousand solutions offered for the problems that exist in Harlem. These solutions have ranged from false profits to the Garvey Universal Negro Improvement Association which was not confined to the boundaries of Harlem but was national in its affect. Self-appointed leaders and so-called friends of the Negro, both white and colored, have made tremendous fortunes through their outrageous use of the sufferings of an afflicted people.

Harlem has not only been misled but has been cheated and starved through dishonest employers and usurious merchants who have employed the condition of a helpless people for their own illegitimate gains. Prices on foodstuffs are from 15 to 25% higher in Harlem than in any part of New York City.

Push cart peddlars and small store-keepers make their profits by outright cheating. Chain stores and larger merchants bring out-dated and shoddy merchandise from downtown stores and sell it in this area . . . charging fancy prices for these products which are no better than refuse. Meats offered for sale here, in many cases, are unfit for human consumption.

In the fall of 1939 a small group of people composed of housewives,

social workers and wage earners gathered in a home to discuss these problems. Their decision was to meet, study and then act. This band of resolute individuals continued to meet, and study over a period of time. They increased their number . . . and the membership was composed of all races and creeds. Then, this heterogeneous group of "just plain people," in the spring of 1940 decided to form a Consumer's Cooperative, and they named their unit the Progressive Consumer's Cooperative League.

The decision to organize a Consumers Cooperative came, after study, as the only solution to the Harlem consumer's problem. The definition of Cooperative is a simple one. It is the getting together of people, voluntarily, with their own money, to supply their own needs. People accept the principle of cooperation to form a society of themselves . . . with their own money, and share in the savings thereby, rather than let someone else make a profit out of them.



The modern Cooperative Movement operates on the Rochdale principles. The principles are: Unlimited membership. Cash business. Interest on capital and rebates on purchases. Goods and services sold on prevailing market prices. Neutrality in religion and politics. Continuous education and expansion.

Thus, because the definition of Cooperation is a simple one, it was accepted as a means of solving Harlem's economic problem. Affiliation with the Harlem Consumer's Cooperative Council and the Eastern Cooperative League was sought and gained.

It was thought that the best way to win the masses of people to the idea of cooperation was to demonstrate while studying. Therefore, arrangements were made with the Morningside Cooperative Society to purchase the needs of the group through them. When the capital accumulation was sufficient, arrangements were made to purchase their needs, directly from the Eastern Cooperative Wholesalers . . . which represents over 300 Eastern Cooperatives . . . all the way from Maine to Florida.

Previous to this — efforts towards Consumer's Cooperation had remained mostly in the theoretical stage. Largely, because it had not reached those who needed it the most.

Not only was the question of food tackled, but efforts were made to interest community groups and church groups in the necessity of Credit Unions as a means of making the people financially independent of installment buying and commercial money lenders, who take more than their pound of flesh from the poor of this community.

Study groups were started in many areas and within a year more than ten credit unions were functioning with deposits of over \$20,000.

Following these successes a conference was held in the fall of 1940 of

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HARLEM FRIENDSHIP HOUSE NEWS

CATHERINE DE HUECK Editor
 MARY K. JERDO Asst. Editor
 EDDIE DOHERTY Contributing Editor
 GRACE FLEWELLING Circulation Manager

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MONDAY NIGHTS

They "just began," those Monday Nights of ours, three years ago, when we opened our Friendship House Library. At first they were gatherings of our Staff and Volunteers, at which we discussed the progress and regress of our work, as well as ways and means of furthering the first and stopping the second.

Then everyone wanted to know more about the Faith they were teaching, the Catholic Action they were attempting to do, and the Negro they were trying to help. Of special interest were his history, background and real needs. So we began inviting Priests, and Lay-people who could best tell us about all these. The circle of listeners grew. They came from everywhere. Colored and White. Catholics and Non-Catholics. Communists and Agnostics. Discussion followed lecture and tea followed discussion. The Monday Night Open Forum of Friendship House was born, grew in popularity and in attendance.

Then the War came. Lectures and arguments waxed hot and hard, yet always friendly. December Seventh and Pearl Harbor cast its shadow heavily on our Monday Nights. The trend of talk changed. The Negro Question, so-called, came to the foreground, which was not to be wondered at, for Friendship House was one of those rare places, where both Races met under the Shadow of the Crucified, whose Cross symbolizes the Brotherhood of Men under the Fatherhood of God. Here, at least, Colored people could talk simply and frankly to white folks, knowing that they would be heard and understood, as well as helped—as much as a "Little Place" like Friendship House could help!

And so, questions and statements rained fast and furious. Out came pain, sorrow, bitterness, bewilderment, and the new spirit of the Race. It is timely that we share it with you, our readers, for you, too, can help and do your bit to bring about the death of Jim Crow, with its abominable, unchristian, undemocratic racial injustice and discrimination. All of us who have heard the voice of the Negro raised in protest, must do our share in that killing. We must do it as Americans. We must do it as human beings, all brothers of each other. We must or we shall have no just peace, which remember—**IS THE FRUIT OF JUSTICE.**

And that is exactly what the Negro wants—**JUSTICE**—not **CHARITY**. Our Monday Nights have made this clear to us. He is fed up with being an object of organized or private charity. Of filling the relief rolls, of working on WPA, NYA, etc. He is a human being. An American. And he is out to demand his rights and heritage as such. More power to him.

AND SO OUR MONDAY NIGHTS BROUGHT OUT THAT THE NEGRO WANTS—THE RIGHT TO LIVE:

Not in the ghettoes of our cities or towns — the Harlems of America. No. Nor behind an invisible, yet unbreakable wall of discrimination or prejudice built

around them, but **ANYWHERE**, as everyone else does. Wherever he might want to live in accordance with his income. Moreover he does not see why his arrival in a neighborhood should create a real estate problem, nor the departure of his white brothers in Christ.

THE NEGRO WANTS THE RIGHT TO WORK:

Not only and always, as a domestic servant, a waiter or waitress, red-cap, porter, or shoe shine man. No. He wants equal opportunities for equal qualifications with equal pay. He wants the full opening of Labor Unions to his membership. He wants to be a doctor, a nurse, in any hospital of the land if he has the qualifications for the same, and not only in those reserved for his Race.

Teachers, Professors, sales clerk, typist, secretary, stenographers, all want work, where there is work of that type to have, and not in restricted areas only, but in fair competition with white applicants.

THE NEGRO WANTS THE RIGHT TO MARRY AND BRING HIS CHILDREN UP DECENTLY:

Not in vermin infested, overcrowded tenement houses, where his children live under the eternal shadow of the White Plague, and many more diseases, with no places to play but the street. With all private schools and colleges closed to them, or almost all, and even some public ones, too. No. He wants a simple, good clean airy home big enough for his family, where sunlight can penetrate easily. Parks and gardens for his kids to play in safely. And all school facilities of the nation, be they private or public, denominational or not, open to them.

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HARLEM'S VOICE

by Claude McKay

In "kingdom," occult haunt and cabaret
 In Harlem, thousands seek surcease from woe,
 And sing and shout and dance, confess and pray
 That Heaven its gifts upon them may bestow:

The good pure food eventually to eat,
 And transformation to angelic state,
 With golden slippers for their swarthy feet,
 To strut in ecstasy through Heaven's gate:

"For you have got a robe and we have none
 To walk into and over God's big Heaven—"
 It matters not. In Heaven all are one,
 And sins of white and sins of black forgiven.

And many who hear the laughter and the song,
 All wise and perfect in their subtlety,
 Imagine that the Negro feels no wrong,
 Contented in his abject misery.

It is an ancient way of slaves to sing,
 Where they are huddled deep down in life's lap,
 And Harlem's voice may rise from suffering
 To startle the nation like a thunder clap.

STAFF REPORTER

By M. K. J.

Our Friendship House News is a year old this month, and a lot can happen in a year. We remember that we wrote little sketches of the Staff for our first column and we are going to repeat the idea on our first anniversary.

We said a lot can happen in a year and certainly the change in Staff at Friendship House bears that out. Only two of the original crew of last year are here now. The two remaining are Floovey and myself, and we are like the river . . . we go on forever. Charlie Summers who was with us last year is joining the Trappists . . . come July. Mary Hallock our ex-staff cook is in nurses training. And Marty Zoechbaur, our little Austrian, is soon to enter the Convent of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

Nothing is static here at FH and we have new recruits to fill the places of the people who left us. Last fall when there were only three of us feverishly trying to keep FH together (and the "B" was stranded in Canada) we got a letter from California. There was an exchange of correspondence and as a result Marie Cepican boarded a bus for New York, Marie was a God-send. We put her in charge of the Clothing Room and she fitted into that trying place like a glove. Marie is a miracle worker. Each week she brings many fallen away Catholics back to the Sacraments. And she amazed the good Fathers of St. Marks by bringing them seven people in one week for instructions. Four a week seems to be her average. The chief reasons for Marie's success, we think, is her natural simplicity and her sweetness and her patience. We think, too, that Marie had a lot of courage to leave lovely Laguna Beach for Harlem.

In December the Baroness went lecturing in the mid-west and a result two more young ladies signed up for this strange, exciting adventure with Christ in the Negro. One was Alice Van Drasek from Minneapolis.

Alice is tall and healthy and exuberant. She is avid to learn all that Friendship House can teach her, so each week Alice finds herself in a different department. She is learning the ropes in Social Work through the courtesy of Betty Schneider, and she is an able assistant to Marie in the Clothing Room. Recently she has been trying to penetrate the mystery of the Friendship House Files. We hope that she is luckier than her predecessors. As yet, that's one mystery that no has fathomed. But, anyhow,

we are glad that Alice decided to "come out of the west." She is pleasant and cheerful and we like having her around.

Belle Bates was the second female "Lochinvar" to come out of the west, and she fitted into the life of Friendship House without ruffling the surface. She had good training, previously, though, for she had been with the Milwaukee Catholic Worker for four years. She is calm, cheerful, a good worker, and "very nice people." Incidentally, from now on you will probably be reading Batesisms because she is going to relieve your current Staff Reporter and Associate Editor of her duties. Come June we are leaving Friendship House for a vacation of indefinite length. We must confess that we are feeling nostalgic and sad, already. But it's always a woman's prerogative to change her mind and we wouldn't be surprised if we got so nostalgic before leaving that we stayed right here. Catholic action and Harlem has gotten under our skin much more than we suspected.

Dame Rumor is around again . . . and this time she hath it that there is more than a possibility that Friendship House will open a second Center, and this time in Chicago. We'll keep you informed of the development of that exciting project.

This month we have two Negro contributors. We don't have to tell you much about Claude McKay. He is one of the outstanding Negro poets and writers, and we are pleased to publish the poem entitled "Harlem's Voice" which he wrote especially for us. Our other contributor is John Harmon and he is the busiest person we know. He didn't tell you in his article "Consumer's Co-op on the March" that almost single-handed he organized the Co-op movement in Harlem. He has an M.A. from Columbia and attended the Rochdale Institute in New York . . . where he learned all the Co-op technique that Rochdale could teach him. In Harlem . . . Co-op and Harmon are synonymous.

We are begging again. A few weeks ago we visited a lady on Welfare Island. We had been corresponding with her for months but had never met, and when we did meet her we as nice as her letters implied. We think that anybody that can remain cheerful and philosophical after being in various City Hospitals for eight years must be a Saint.

Eight years ago Mrs. J. had a stroke and she is still partially crippled. Since coming to Welfare Island she

THE BARONESS JOTS IT DOWN

Today, as I promised in the last issue, I am going to talk figures to you. Not the fat-thin kind . . . the dollar cents kind. I confess I don't like either figures or dollars or even cents. But when one is trying to run a Friendship House, they, alas, become very important . . . How important no one can guess until they try.

To me, they are really never just cold plain figures, they mean people and what one can do, or leave undone for people. Real, wonderful people, who just happen to be poor. That is why ceaselessly we all beg, ceaselessly and perhaps shamelessly. But, we have to, because these good people need what that money can give them. It is our privilege and duty to get it for them. And the only way we know of getting it, is through prayers and begging. So we do a lot of both.

Here it is, an itemized statement of the use of these precious dollars. We have put down as best we could the monthly budget, but we confess that often, very often, we run over and above it. I would simply put it that our expenditure runs to approximately \$1000. per month — \$12,000. per year. A terrific sum to pay and beg for. Some of it comes from my lectures. I get many of those and a good fee, which I turn over to Friendship House's hungry mouth . . . The rest comes from you dear friends. Now you understand why we keep on writing to you over and over. Forgive our begging, and listen to our voice . . . please, because it isn't ours, but the voice of God's very own poor, Christ in the Negro Himself. We are but your hands. The Charity and Reward is YOURS.

Library rental	\$50
CYO Clubs (Cubs) rental	35
CYO Club (Generals) rental	40
CYO Club (Jr. Concilers) rental	30
Clothing Room rental	30
Madonna Flat (Staff apt.) rental	40
Baroness' Flat rental	28
Mrs. Watson (rent 2 workers)	32
Mr. Romero (rent 1 worker)	12
Mrs. Brown (rent 1 worker)	16
Miss Gabou (rent 1 worker)	16
Telephones for four premises	50
Gas and light for all premises	40
Groceries and staples for Staff	40
Food money for staff and guests	15
Salary 1 Club Worker (spec.)	30
Groceries for poor	50
Dinners for Bro. Christophers	15
Office supplies and Postage	160
Club supplies	40
Cook's salary	20
Miscellaneous	50
Total	\$839

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CO-OPS

(Continued)

representatives of some 30 or more Community Organizations. And at this time a decision was reached to incorporate a Community-wide Consumers Society which is today known as the Harlem Consumer's Society, Incorporated.

The next problem confronting this group of pioneers was to build its membership and secure capital necessary to carry out its purpose. The first approach was through mass meetings. A goal of \$3000 was set and a membership of 300 people was necessary to reach this goal. However, the community is poor and the people wanted something tangible for their money. Six months passed and nothing startling happened. Many members became discouraged. Funds were scarce for administrative purposes. Something had to be done. A conference was held with the officials from the Consumers Milk Cooperative when the price of milk threatened to rise to a point where the average person of the community could not afford to buy it. It was decided to open Cooperative Milk Depots, in churches or other institutions where space could be secured. The first depot was opened Monday, October 11th, 1941 on the doorsteps of the Abyssinian Baptist Church and milk was sold . . . two quarts for twenty-five cents. The first week 1500 quarts were sold. The newspapers made picture stories and the Community began to learn that cooperation paid. We had found our lobster. The membership rapidly increased and today we are over two-thirds of the way to our goal of members.

The success of the Milk Depot encouraged us to add eggs when they were unusually high. The community began to appreciate these benefits and see the necessity of building cooperatives. On April the 11th, 1942 sufficient membership and money had been secured to open up a street location with a complete line of canned and dairy products.

The society seems to be well on its way. With the coming of the war and the rapid increase in the cost of living the Cooperative is the sought-for rather than the seeker. Trade unions, women's organizations, church groups are encouraging their members to support the cooperative. The cooperative itself has become a community institution taking the lead in proposing measures for the general improvement of living conditions in Harlem.

A conference has been proposed for the future at which it is hoped that

the leadership of the community will gather to work out an economic program for Harlem with cooperation as its base. Part of this agenda is to establish Consumer Cooperation as a mass movement. In this it is necessary to show the people that they have within themselves the power to solve their own problems . . . whether it is in the securing of better houses, better food, more privileges or cultural advancement.

MONDAY NIGHTS (Continued)

The Negro wants fair wages, to keep his wife at home with the kiddies and not slaving late into each night to supplement the slender budget. He wants money enough for a normal holiday for himself and his family. But what kind of a holiday can he have when, wherever he goes, he finds the spoken or unspoken words "restricted to whites," as is the universal practice today in Hot Dog Stands, Restaurants, and Hotels or Resorts, even in the States which have on their Law Status, section 40 of the Bill of Civil Rights that forbids this abominable practice.

THE NEGRO WANTS THE RIGHT TO THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.

Up to now both — pursuit and happiness—have been denied to him because he has been set apart, a pariah in a land that is fighting a battle to death for democracy and Christianity. And speaking of fighting, the Negro is loyal, the Negro is American, but if we grant him these fundamental rights, which will involve also the right and privilege of dying for them side by side with his white brother, not in Jim Crow Regiments either, then the Negro will fight as all free men do . . . with a song in his heart, and a light in his eyes, that

death cannot extinguish.

These are the things the Negro wants. And our Monday nights are clarifying these legitimate wants of his, for us, and thru us, for You. Make no mistake friend, this time he means to get them. Today, White America is facing a new Negro. The Race has come of age. It is well for us all to realize this. There are Thirteen Million Negroes in America. One out of every tenth American is a Negro.

Will he get what he wants and has a right to in justice, and through a democratic process, or will the blindness of old outworn prejudices in the hearts and minds of white Americans, make the Negro bitter and full of a hate that bids tragedy today in a country at war, and misery for the tomorrow to come!!!

THE ANSWER RESTS WITH YOU, WHITE CHRISTIAN AMERICA . . . WHAT SHALL IT BE?

STAFF REPORTER (Continued)

was converted to Catholicism and she is now a daily communicant. During the course of our conversation with her we noticed a lot of balconies outside of the hospital windows and we asked her if she ever went out there. She said, no, that only those people who had wheelchairs could sit out there in the sun . . . and watch the boats on the East River and see the New York skyline. And she sounded wistful—this nice Negro lady called Mrs. J.

She didn't ask us to try and get her a wheel chair . . . but we knew we'd have to try, so we are appealing to you. It would make her awfully happy. And it would make us happy, too. Do you think that you can help us?

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